DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 695 EA 028 166

AUTHOR Sahin, Ali E.; Simsek, Hasan
TITLE A Qualitative Assessment of Organizational Learning Processes in Selected Turkish Public and Private High Schools.
PUB DATE Oct 96
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration (10th, Louisville, KY, October 25-27, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Foreign Countries; *High Schools; *Information Dissemination; Information Utilization; *Organizational Change; *Organizational Climate; Organizational Communication; *Organizational Development; Private Schools; Public Schools; *School Organization
IDENTIFIERS *Turkey (Ankara)

ABSTRACT

If they are to be effective, organizations must acquire and create new knowledge in order to achieve their goals. Service organizations, such as schools, must employ the concept of organizational learning. Organizational learning is an intentional process directed at improving organizational effectiveness. The process involves four constructs--knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory. This paper presents findings of a paper that examined the ways in which three high schools--one foundation school (designed to educate youth in keeping with the concept of nationalism embodied in the ideas and innovations of Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic), one private school, and one public school--in Ankara, Turkey, acquired, disseminated, interpreted, and preserved new knowledge. Data were derived from observation and interviews with 24 teachers and 6 administrators. Findings indicate that the foundation school outperformed the public school and the private school in terms of the four organizational-learning constructs. The foundation school gathered data through a wider variety of sources and distributed information through more intra- and extra-organizational activities than did the other two schools. Both the foundation school and the private school had more effective interpretation processes. None of the three schools had developed mechanisms for storing information for further use. The effectiveness of both the public and private schools was hindered by their centralized, bureaucratic organizational structures; the effectiveness of the private school was also hampered by the school's profit motive. One figure is included. (Contains 39 references.) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 402 695

A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING PROCESSES IN SELECTED TURKISH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

Ali E. Sahin
Arizona State University, U.S.A.

Hasan Simsek
Middle East Technical University, Turkey

Paper presented at the annual conference of the University Council For Educational Administration (UCEA), Louisville, Kentucky, October 25-27, 1996. Comments are welcome.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
A. Sahin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

EA 028 166

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine and compare organizational learning processes (knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory) in one foundation high school, one private high school, and one public high school in Ankara. It is based on a case study design, observation in school sites and interviews with 24 teachers and 6 administrators in an effort to collect the data.

Findings of the study indicate that the Foundation School is far better in the domains of knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory than the Public and the Private School. Of the latter two, there is evidence of centralized organizational structure and administrative processes which inhibit learning capacity of these schools.

Keywords: Organizational Learning, Learning Organization, Organizational Learning Processes.

A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING PROCESSES IN SELECTED TURKISH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

Ali E. Sahin
Arizona State University, U.S.A.
Hasan Simsek
Middle East Technical University, Turkey

Introduction

Science and technology present new knowledge, theories, innovations, and methods that change our life on a daily basis. Profound improvements in technology effect every aspect of life. Not only society, but also its institutions are affected by these improvements. Organizations try to acquire and create new knowledge to achieve their goals effectively. That is, adaptation to the change and the use of the new technologies to do this are the crucial subjects for organizations. Sustaining organizational existence partly depends on the level of new knowledge gained from the environment. Moreover, continuous improvement and gaining a competitive advantage are possible if organizations learn something new. According to Ulrich et al., (1993: 55), the ability to adapt quickly stems from an ability to learn, i.e., the ability to assimilate new ideas and the ability to transfer those ideas into action faster than a competitor. Without this mental and physical dexterity, firms will likely fail to recognize changing customer expectations, stay with existing product lines beyond reason, and remain unresponsive to competitors' initiatives. As Garvin (1993: 86) points out, organizations- and individuals- simply repeat old practices if they are not learning systems. In this case, improvements are either fortuitous or short lived. Similarly, Kim (1993: 37) argues that all organizations learn -whether they consciously choose or not- it is a fundamental requirement for their sustained existence.

Service organizations such as education, health or security have similar barriers to sustained existence, competitiveness, improvement and effectiveness, the same as

industrial organizations. These problems are of particular importance especially in the sectors in which the share of public weight is in decline. Such cases require intentional learning processes (knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, organizational memory) in service organizations similarly to industrial organizations. Therefore, the concepts of organizational learning and organizational learning processes should be examined and evaluated in service organizations as well.

The Turkish national education system was established in 1920, during the Turkish Independence War. From its beginning and up to the 1970s, education at all levels was completely funded by the state, which ended up as an absolute control by the state of educational affairs. Since the late 1970s, amendments to the Constitution have made the private sector enter into the educational activities. The share of the private sector in education is now hovering around 3 percent, that is, there still is a heavy hand of the state in national education. Education is administered by the central organization in Ankara, with each of the 74 provinces maintaining education directorates which report officially through the provincial governors to the Ministry.

Turkey's population is about 64 million with a population growth rate of 2.2 percent. Statistically speaking, each year 1,300,000 new students enter the education system. As of 1994, there were 70,000 government schools providing education to over 12,000,000 students in primary, secondary, vocational and technical schools and institutions of higher learning (World Bank, 1989).

In 1988-1989, the general education system covered about 54,000 preschools and primary schools with nearly 7,000,000 students and 227,000 teachers, 5700 middle schools with 2,000,000 students and 42,000 teachers, and 1450 general secondary schools with about 700,000 students and 57,000 teachers.

Since 1983, privatization activities in public institutions have led to major changes, not only in industrial organizations, but also in educational organizations in Turkey. The point of view that educational services are ultimately the tasks of government has been losing its credibility. Thus, the number of private and non-public

schools has increased gradually. The private sector's involvement in education has brought remarkable improvement since 1983. Despite their small weight, private schools present a new view of education in the Turkish educational system. It is expected that public education will further lose its traditional power, and the niche will be filled by private and non-public schools in coming years.

Framework

The topic of organizational learning has recently gained substantial attention, but there is little agreement on what organizational learning means and even less on how to create a learning organization. The basic concept of organizations as learning systems can be traced back to Frederic Taylor and his development of scientific management in the early 1900s. Taylor's premise was that as management truths are articulated and measured, these learnings can then be transferred to other employees and thus improve the efficiency of the organization (Ulrich et al., 1993: 55). The concept of organizational learning finds its roots in the cybernetic models of the 1960s. It was popularized by major organizational scientists such as Simon (1960), Argyris and Schon (1978), and lately, by Senge (1990). This overview suggests that the study of organizational learning is not new. What is new, however, is the recent interest in how the concept of the learning organization can help managers build competitive enterprises (Ulrich et al., 1993: 55).

A number of reasons are suggested by Dodgson (1993) on why the study of organizational learning is currently so popular and why the concept of "learning organization" is gaining priority among large organizations. First, organizations attempt to develop structures and systems which are more adaptable and responsive to change. It is increasingly appreciated that learning is a key to competitiveness. Second is the profound influence of rapid technological changes upon organizations. Third, learning is a dynamic concept, which helps to understand the continually changing nature of the organizations. Furthermore, it is an integrative concept that can unify various levels of

analyses: individual, group, corporate, which is particularly helpful in reviewing the cooperative and community nature of organizations (Dodgson, 1993: 376). In a similar way, Ulrich et al., (1993: 54) argue that learning in organizations matters more now than in the past for three reasons: workforce competence, capacity for change, and competitiveness. They believe that the acquisition of competence, the ability to change, and the need to be competitive are critical success factors for any public or private organization. By enlarging its capacity to learn, the organization increases its chances of success in each of these dimensions.

Organizational learning is not easy to understand as a concept. Various definitions of the learning organization have been put forward. When organizational scientists think about organizational learning, they often think of it as an intentional process directed at improving effectiveness. Most scholars view organizational learning as a process that unfolds over time and link it with knowledge acquisition, improved performance and organizational actions (Fiol and Lyles, 1985: 803; Garvin, 1993: 80; Senge, 1991: 37).

Argyris and Schon (1978: 58) define organizational learning as "...a process in which members of an organization detect error or anomaly and correct it by restructuring organizational theory of action, embedding the results of their inquiry in organizational maps and images."

Stata (1989) views organizational learning as the principal process by which management innovation occurs. He argues that the rate at which individuals and organizations learn may become the only sustainable competitive advantage, especially in knowledge-intensive organizations (Stata, 1989: 64).

Dodgson (1993) described organizational learning as the ways firms build, supplement and organize knowledge and routines around their activities and within their cultures, and adapt and develop organizational efficiency by improving the use of the broad skills of their workforces (Dodgson, 1993: 377). This broad definition incorporates a number of assumptions:

1. Learning generally has positive consequences even though the outcomes of learning may be negative, i.e. organizations learn by making mistakes.

2. Although learning is based on individuals in the workforce, organizations can learn *in toto*. While emphasizing the role of human agency in learning, corporate and group culture is influenced by individual learning and can assist the direction and use of that learning.

3. Learning occurs throughout all the activities of the organization, and, it occurs at different speeds and levels. Encouraging and coordinating the variety of interactions in learning is a key organizational task (Dodgson, 1993: 377).

The characteristics of the learning organizations are described by organizational scientists. Senge (1990) describes the learning organizations as places "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together." To achieve these ends, he suggests the use of five "component technologies": system thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning.

According to Pedler et al., "the learning organization facilitates the learning of all its members and continually transforms itself." Such an organization;

> "- has a climate in which individual members are encouraged to learn and develop their full potential.
> - extends this learning culture to include customers, suppliers and other significant stakeholders.
> - makes human resource development strategy central to business policy.
> -continually undergoes a process of organizational transformation" (Pedler at. al., 1989: 1-8).

To Garvin (1993), on the other hand, a learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and, at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights (Garvin, 1993: 80). This definition begins with a simple truth: new ideas are essential if learning is to take place.

Organizational scientists think of organizational learning as an intentional process directed at improving organizational effectiveness. This learning process requires information-gathering and processing activities focusing on goals and objectives; norms, strategies, and assumptions governing tasks; and rules for allocating task and adjusting task behavior (Sullivan, 1986: 129). This process involves four constructs: (1)knowledge acquisition, (2)information distribution, (3)information interpretation, and (4)organizational memory.

1. Knowledge Acquisition: Knowledge acquisition is the process by which knowledge is obtained. Many formal and informal activities are intended to acquire information or knowledge. Organizations acquire some of their knowledge through experimentation. This activity involves the systematic searching for and testing of new knowledge, the use of scientific method, and systematic problem solving (Garvin, 1993: 85). Not all information or knowledge comes through experimentation. Some knowledge is obtained through the search to learn about the strategies, administrative processes, and best practices of other organizations. This process is called "benchmarking." Through this process, the best practices of others can be analyzed, adopted, and implemented. Similarly, Huber (1991: 96) suggests another term, "corporate intelligence," which is associated with the idea of searching for information about what corporate competitors are doing and how they are doing it. Channels for acquiring this information include consultants, professional meetings, trade shows, publications, vendors and suppliers, and, in less competitive environments, networks of professionals. In the learning process from other organizations, the leader has an important role. Schein (1990: 90) stresses that learning can be speeded up if leaders spend more time outside their own organizations. Leaders should systematically attend programs and conferences where they are exposed to new ideas, other leaders, academics, consultants and members of other occupations.

Organizations gain some knowledge from their past experience. Learning also comes from many small failures. In this process, success and failures are assessed

systematically. According to Esterbysmith (1990: 26), the problem with encouraging creativity and innovation is that many new initiatives are bound to fail, and it is crucial that people are not punished for taking risks that fail. As Slocum (1994: 41) stresses, to learn effectively from failures, managers need to see how previous missteps can translate into knowledge or actions that ultimately strengthen their firm's core competence and competitive advantage. Managers must confront the reasons for earlier failures head-on and answer the question: how can we apply what we learned to future activities?

2. Information Distribution: Many organizational members and units that serve as knowledge acquirers also, as part of their role, share what they have acquired with other components. Information distribution is the process by which information from different sources is shared and thereby leads to new information or understanding (Huber, 1991: 90). For learning to be more than a local affair, knowledge must spread quickly and efficiently throughout the organization. Ideas carry maximum impact when they are shared broadly rather than held in a few hands. Ulrich et al., (1993: 60) imply that unless the idea is shared across a boundary, it is not considered learning capability. A variety of mechanisms spur this process, including written, oral, and visual reports, site visits and tours, personnel rotation programs, education and training programs, and standardization programs. Combining information from different subunits leads not only to new information but also to new understanding.

3. Information Interpretation: Daft and Weick (1984: 294) define interpretation as "the process through which information is given meaning", and also as "the process of translating events and developing shared understandings and conceptual schemes". It seems reasonable to conclude that more learning has occurred when more and more varied interpretations have been developed, because such development changes the range of the organization's potential behaviors, and this is congruent with the definition of learning. It also seems reasonable to conclude that more learning has

occurred when more of the organization's units understand the nature of the various interpretations held by other units (Huber, 1991: 101).

4. Organizational Memory: Organizational memory refers to stored information from an organization's history that can be brought to bear on present decisions. This information is stored as a consequence of implementing decisions to which they refer, by individual recollections, and through shared interpretations (Walsh and Ungson, 1991: 61). Sinkula (1994: 36) points out that despite their influence on organizational learning, individuals come and go and can have more (or less) knowledge than the organization. This is why an organization may preserve knowledge of the past even when key organizational members leave. Since much of the memory of organizations is stored in human heads and only a little of it in procedures put down on paper (or held in computer memories), turnover of personnel is a great enemy of long-term organizational memory (Simon, 1991: 128).

Members of the organization use a common grammar by creating organizational memory. Therefore, they can share beliefs, assumptions and norms within the organization easily. However, as Lee, et al., (1992: 33) state, blind adaptation of past organizational maps will cause group members to lose creative decision making behavior. Therefore, the channel between organizational memory and an assumption surfacing module should be tightly coupled to detect changing environments and to generate counter-hypotheses .

Problem Statement

Using a case study design, the purpose of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of three types of schools from an organizational learning perspective: a public school, a private school and a foundation school in the capitol of Turkey, Ankara.

The following research questions guided the data collection procedure:

1. Which methods are used to *acquire new knowledge* in the schools included in the study?

2. Which methods are used to *distribute information* in the schools included in the study?
3. Which methods are used to *interpret information* in the schools included in the study?
4. Which methods are used to *preserve new knowledge* in the schools included in the study?

The Cases

This study was carried out in one foundation high school, one private high school, and one public high school in Ankara. When these schools were introduced, the specific information of the schools was not illustrated. Therefore, from here on, the schools will be called "the Foundation School", "the Private School" and "the Public School" instead of their original names.

The Foundation High School: The general aim of the Foundation School is to educate the youth in keeping with the concept of nationalism embodied in the ideas and innovations of Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic. The school was founded by people who dedicated themselves to education.

The Foundation School is a form of private school in that tuition is required for attendance, however, the school does not operate for profit. Tuition and fees charged from the students for education services are transferred into education processes. There is always high demand for enrollment due to the good reputation and high quality of education. Admission to the school is done through the nationwide Private School Examination.

The Administrative Board is at the top of the administrative hierarchy. General director and school principal positions are overseen by the board. Besides these, the school has also two assistant principals. Administrative decisions involve the principal as well as parent and teachers, which lead to shared vision.

There are 844 students and 28 classes in the school. The number of students in each class is limited to thirty. Two groups of teachers have been working in the school:

1. Fully experienced French teachers from France, employed according to the cultural agreements between the Turkish and French governments. There are currently 18 French teachers actively working in the school.

2. Turkish teachers are selected through examination. These teachers sign an annual contract. Turkish teachers are sent to France to improve their language ability and to learn new teaching methods.

The school has one year preparatory school, three years of middle school and three years of lycée. It has a statute of Anatolian High School and Private High School. The instruction in high school is primarily in French, with English or German being elective courses for students. Subjects such as Math., Physics, Chemistry and Biology are taught in French.

The Foundation High School has achieved considerably successful results in the University Entrance Examination(UEE). In 1991, 1992, and 1993, it occupied 78th place out of 3038 high schools, 75th place out of 3231 high schools, and 23rd place out of 3535 high schools in Turkey, respectively, according to verbal weight listing. From the listing made for the high schools in its type, private high schools offering education in foreign language, it has taken 16th place among 82 schools in 1992, and 11th place among 97 schools in 1993. In addition, The Foundation School is the most successful school in Ankara according to 1993 UEE results.

In the school, supportive services such as program development, measurement and evaluation, guidance and counseling are used effectively. Each service has at least two specialists who are well-trained in their areas.

The Private High School: The Private School is owned by a private entity and operates for profit which causes aggressive recruitment. Administrative decisions are made primarily by the owners of the school. Therefore, the contribution of the principal, teachers, and parents is very limited. Almost a small-scale centralized structure of the Ministry of Education is seen in the Private School. At the top, there are

the school owners who are authorized to make all decisions, and at the lower levels, there are administrators and teachers who are obliged to conform to such decisions unconditionally.

The Private School has roughly 400 students, 1 principal, 2 assistant principals, 33 teachers and 15 employees. The school is continuing teaching with 50 percent capacity.

The school has one year preparatory school, three years of middle school and three years of lycée. It has a statute of Anatolian High School and Private School. Admission to the school is done through the nationwide Private School Examination. The high school provides education in English, and German is provided as the second foreign language.

The place of Private High School, in terms of its performance, compared to all high schools in Turkey and to private high schools teaching in foreign language is of considerable interest. While it has ranked 313th place among 3231 high schools in the 1992 UEE general listing, it has taken 70th place among 82 private schools. In other words, it is listed behind most of the private schools. The results of 1983 are similar. It was 488th among 3585 schools in general listing and it took 92nd place among 97 private high schools in Turkey in 1983.

The Private School has a modern appearance in terms of physical facilities. A private room is furnished for interviews with parents. Teachers' room are very comfortable. Also, some rooms are shared amongst teachers who teach the same courses.

The school has a computer lab., language lab., and science lab. for student use. The school library covers a 440 sq.meter area with various books. In addition, the school has a gymnasium and conference hall. Medical services, administered by a full-time doctor, are always available to the students.

The Public High School: The Public High School is affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. Any students can attend the school free of charge. It is primarily financed from the government budget. Because of a centralized structure of the public school system, any initiative attempt for school improvement is expected to come from the top authority. It has approximately 4700 students, 1 principal, 170 teachers, 1 head asst. principal, 10 asst. principals, 4 guidance counselors, and 13 administrative personnel.

The instruction in the school is in the native language, Turkish. In addition to this, students are obliged to take one of the foreign language courses of English, French, and German.

The Public High School has the most elite position among public schools in Ankara (in Turkey even). Especially in terms of UEE results, it takes the top places in public school listings. For example, according to 1994 UEE quantitative results, it took 9th place among 1500 public schools in Turkey. Its relative success among public high schools is not evident when the private schools are included. For example, it took 10th place among *public* schools in 1991, and 9th place in 1994. However, it took 181st place among 3308 high schools (private and public) in 1991, falling to 293rd place in 1994.

Demand for the public high school has increased substantially due to its success among public schools. Therefore, the number of students in each classroom has increased to about 60 to 70. Most of the students are from middle class families. Many students preparing for University Entrance Exam attend private courses. Private courses may be considered as one of the important factors affecting the performance of the public high school among other public schools.

In the school, there is one gymnasium, one library, one biology laboratory. 170 teachers working in school use only one teacher room. There is no admissions room for parents to be interviewed in, and no shared rooms for teachers who are teaching the same subject.

Methods

Cases and Sampling

Three types of schools were chosen in the capitol city of Turkey, Ankara for the research: A foundation school, a private school and a public. These schools were selected with respect to their University Entrance Examination (UEE) results. Higher education admission in Turkey is based on a centrally administered examination which is given once a year nationwide. Students from different types of high schools (public, private, vocational, technical) take this examination every year to enter the universities in Turkey. Prof. Dr. Fevzi Toker, head of the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM), points out that UEE results can be used to assess the performance of high schools. According to Toker, the basic cognitive skills of students, which the schools are expected to improve, are measured through the UEE, and this may be used as an indicator of performance of schools. By the same token, parents and students also evaluate performance of schools based on the students' results on the UEE.

According to 1993 UEE verbal results, ***the Foundation School*** was ranked among the top 0.65 percent in the general listing, and it was ranked among the top 9.6 percent in the private schools listing. ***The Private School*** was ranked among the top 13.8 percent in the general listing, and it was ranked among the bottom 5.2 percent in the private schools listing. ***The Public School*** was ranked among the top 18.1 percent in the general listing, and it was ranked the top 6.8 percent in the public school listing.

The Foundation School has shown high performance in the UEE in the general listing and in the private schools listing. The private school has shown relatively good performance in the UEE in the general listing, but it has shown a very low performance in the UEE in the private schools listing. The Public School has shown very high performance in the UEE in the public schools listing, but it fell behind the private schools in the UEE. Scientists view organizational learning as a process which improves the performance of organization (Fiol and Lyles, 1985: 803; Garvin, 1993:80;

Senge, 1991; 37), and when the key features of organizational learning such as competition, performance, and effectiveness are considered, these schools were found to be suitable for this study.

A stratified random sampling strategy was used to form the sample. Teachers in each school were stratified according to their subject area. In each school, one teacher was randomly selected from each subject area (a total of 8 teachers from each school based on eight fields of teaching: Science, Social Science, Arts, Sports, Turkish, Mathematics, Foreign Languages, and General Culture). In addition, the principal of the school and an assistant principal were added to the sample in each school. A total of 24 teachers and 6 administrators were interviewed in three schools for the study. A typical interview ran about 50 minutes. During the interviews, the interviewer took notes. As a result, about 80 single-spaced pages of interview transcripts were produced.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using an interview form and a school information form. The interview form was developed involving 15 open-ended questions which were derived from reviewing the related literature. First, the methods and the activities in the organizational learning processes were determined from the literature, then, these methods and activities were transformed into question form. Questions in the interview schedule dealt with four dimensions of the organizational learning processes: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory.

The school information form consists of four sections. In each, the following dimensions were developed to gather information in each school: number of school personnel, physical qualities of the work environment, the methods used preserving knowledge for future use, school and teaching-learning related development activities (seminars, courses) during the last two years in each school.

The interview schedule was initially pilot-tested with five randomly selected high school teachers and two school principals. After each interview, interviewees' comments were elicited, followed by a number of fundamental changes in the schedule. As a result, almost all interview questions were rewritten.

Data Analysis

Content analysis technique was used to analyze the data (Patton, 1980). Interview data from the 24 teachers and 6 administrators were organized by using a word processing program. First, 4 questions listed earlier as research questions were used as major categories through which the data could be sorted. By using the word processor program, responses of 8 teachers and 2 administrators in each school were cut and pasted under each category. Then, thematic similarities and differences were identified under each category. Hence, information elicited through the school information form was also cited under each category. Finally, frequencies and percentages were drawn from the data.

Findings

Q1. "Which methods are used to acquire new knowledge in the schools included in the study?"

Interviewees identified the following 10 ways of acquiring new knowledge in the case schools:

- Journals and periodicals
- Activities such as symposiums and seminars
- Collaboration with universities
- Visits to other schools
- Gaining information about competing schools
- Experimentation
- Recruiting and transferring qualified and experienced teachers from other schools.
- Learning from failures
- Taking risks
- Collaboration with parents

The schools utilize these ways at different levels. For example, compared to the other two, the Foundation School subscribes to more periodicals (a total of 12) published within the country and abroad. They are readily accessible and kept in the school library for teachers' use . All of the interviewed teachers (8/8) in the Foundation School stated that such periodicals are broadly used and that the acquired new knowledge is widely shared by teachers. The Private School, on the other hand, subscribes to only three periodicals which are kept in the principal's office. Almost all the teachers interviewed in this school (7/8) were not aware of such subscriptions, except for the official bulletin of the Ministry of National Education (Tebligler Dergisi). The Public School, however, does not subscribe to any periodicals. Only the official bulletin of the Ministry is sent to the school, free of charge by the Ministry of National Education.

Regarding developmental activities, the Foundation School organized eight seminars and symposiums in the last two years, considerably higher when compared to the other two: the Private School organized three activities, and the Public School had made none such efforts. Also, teachers and administrators of the Foundation School have participated in various out of school activities such as international seminars on education and international foreign language symposiums. However, teachers in the Private and Public Schools only attended in-service education courses provided by the Ministry of National Education. These seminars and courses are usually of low quality and are considered routine activities. They do not serve sufficientlly for the developmental needs of schools.

The Foundation School has established strong communication and collaboration with universities and other institutions, that serve as an enrichment of the ways for acquisition of new knowledge. Ten activities have so far been implemented through the cooperation of the Foundation School with universities. On the other hand, from the statements of all the interviewed teachers from the Private School and the Public

School, it is evident that these schools have not had any such collaboration with universities and other institutions.

None of the three schools subject to this research have made purposeful or planned visits to other schools for new knowledge acquisition purposes. Rather, information about various aspects of other schools is gathered through unplanned, causal individual visits or contacts.

Of the findings regarding competition among schools, all of the interviewed teachers in the Private School (8/8) stated that they were in competition with all other private schools. More than half of the interviewed teachers in the Foundation School stated that they were in competition with successful private schools. Almost all interviewed teachers in the Public School stated that competition with other schools was not a concern in their school. Although both the Foundation School and the Private School accept competitive environments in the educational sector, both of them do not have any planned strategies or ways of monitoring the activities of their competitors and of transferring their effective applications. The information concerning teaching/learning and administrative policies of competitor schools is often gained randomly.

Teachers interviewed in the three schools mentioned their own experimentation as one of the ways of gaining new knowledge. Most often, they use this method when "knowledge, theories, and methods in the field are limited" or for the purpose of "testing requirements of some theories and approaches in special cases."

Instead of transferring in successful and experienced from other schools, the Foundation School hires teachers through written and oral examinations. However, successful teachers having different experiences and approaches are invited to the school on a payment per course basis. Thus, the transferring of new knowledge to the school is possible to some extent. However, Public and Private School administrators have no authorization in respect to staffing. In the case of the Public School, the sole authority for selection and appointment of teaching staff is the Ministry of Education, and for the Private School, it is the founders of the school.

Seven out of eight teachers in the Foundation School and in the Public School alike, and four out of eight teachers in the Private School stated that they were not afraid of making mistakes, and they generally get feedback for correcting their mistakes. In fact, they also indicated that their administrators had no way of detecting their mistakes. However, more than half of the interviewed teachers in these schools stated that they do not want to take risks.

More than half of the teachers interviewed in the Foundation School (5/8) stated that parents are a good source of acquiring new knowledge through their suggestions about various aspects of the school as well as teaching and learning processes. Parents from a great variety of occupations i.e., psychologist, sociologist, academicians provide valuable contribution to the acquisition of new knowledge. Teachers interviewed in the Private School stated that parents' contribution to the new knowledge acquisition process is rare or very limited. All the teachers in the Public School (8/8) agreed that contribution by parents to facilitate new knowledge for the school is simply not the case. They stated that communication with parents is very limited and occasional, in most cases, just briefing them about their children's grades no more than twice in each semester.

Q2. "Which methods are used to distribute information in the schools included in the study?"

Figure 1. Methods used to distribute and share new knowledge

Foundation School	**Private School**	**Public School**
Parents meetings	Parents meetings	Parents meetings
Teacher committee meetings	Teacher committee meetings	Teacher committee meetings
Subject teachers meetings	Subject teachers meetings	Subject teachers meetings
Panels	Panels	Panels
School Magazine	School Magazine	
Semester grade list	Semester grade list	
Copied written texts for parents		
School radio (Bonjur)		
Announcements within the school		
Annual school publications		
Activities such as exhibition		
Brochures		

In the previous section regarding the findings about knowledge acquisition in the three schools, when we examined the first subproblem, we found that the Foundation School uses more sources for acquiring new knowledge compared to the other two schools. Similarly, findings regarding the second subproblem indicate that the Foundation School uses more methods for distribution and sharing of new knowledge compared to the other two schools.

Almost all the teachers in the Foundation School (7/8) stated that new knowledge is widely shared. However, one of them indicated that new knowledge is used when requested. Findings also indicate that the most effective method used in the school concerning the sharing of new knowledge was group work by the teachers who teach the same subject. All the teachers in the Private School (8/8) stated that new knowledge and experiences are shared broadly by the teachers. They similarly pointed out the effectiveness of group work.

More than half of the teachers in the Public School (6/8) stated that the sharing of new knowledge is very limited, only through informal contacts during breaks. All the teachers (8/8) stated that group work is not the norm in their school. The others stated that group work by teachers who teach the same subject is not for the purpose of professional development or school improvement, but for the purpose of administrative obligation imposed by the Ministry of Education.

On the other hand, it seems that casual as well as formal contacts within the school building seem important in sharing new knowledge. The Foundation School and the Private School are far better in terms of the space devoted for these contacts as well as the quality of these places. There are, for example, special rooms allocated for meetings of same-subject teachers both in the Foundation School and the Private School. Furthermore teachers' rooms in these two schools are furnished in a comfortable manner. Thus, most of the teachers use these places during the breaks and they have more opportunities to work together and share ideas. However, there is only

one teachers' room for 170 teachers in the Public School. Noise, poor ventilation, and a crowded environment may adversely affect knowledge-sharing in this school.

Q3. "Which methods are used to interpret information in schools included in the study?"

All the teachers in the Foundation School and the Private School stated that distribution of knowledge in connection with a new case or with a new piece of information varies. Some of them expressed the following opinions:

- *"An idea that seems unacceptable at the beginning can be seen acceptable at the end of discussion."*
- *"Marginal views are also listened to and discussed."*
- *"There exists variety in comments and suggestions. Meetings are very colorful."*

Almost all of the teachers in the Public School (7/8) stated that the comments concerning cases and events are usually similar to each other. According to them, meetings do not provide anything other than being a ritual repeated aimlessly, just being a meeting "required by regulations" as such that:

- *"Sometimes someone is curious or creatively suggests a different thing, but such suggestion or comment is rejected during voting. "*
- *"No one tries to suggest a different approach."*
- *"Teachers react negatively to the prolongation of meetings because they believe that nothing worthwhile will be produced at the end."*

Q4. "Which methods are used to preserve new knowledge in the schools included in the study?"

The findings of the study indicate that the three schools show both similarities and differences with respect to the storing of experiences and new knowledge. Of the similarities, all of the three schools show great care in storing official information (enrollment, attendance, diploma, graduation, certification, etc.). Filing systems are used in an effective manner for such purposes.

In the Foundation School, information concerning guidance services, examination questions and results, attendance schedules, and accounting information

are stored in a computer database system. The efforts to establish a school museum still continue. Photographs concerning various activities are preserved in an album. Similarly, in the Private School, information in connection with student affairs and accounting are stored in a computer system. In addition, photographs and video cassettes concerning various school activities and celebrations are stored. The Public School, on the other hand, has no such systems of preserving and storing information beyond the official (enrollment, attendance, diploma, graduation, certification, etc.).

Almost all the teachers interviewed in the three schools stated that they do not record the problems they encounter in the education process, the solutions to these problems that they found themselves, nor their school experiences. What happens as a result is the fact that, they remarked, as they leave the school, they take away all the information and experiences they accumulated and learned either randomly or purposefully.

Discussion and Conclusions

The data obtained from 24 teachers and 6 administrators from three schools through interviewing techniques have revealed essential differences among the schools with respect to their organizational learning processes.

Knowledge Acquisition: Of the knowledge acquisition process, the Foundation School seems to be acquiring new knowledge from a variety of sources compared to the Private School and the Public School. While the Private and the Public Schools are acquiring new knowledge only from experimentation and correction of failures, the Foundation School is using periodicals, organizing activities such as seminars, and designing various projects with other institutions, such as universities to acquire new knowledge. Furthermore, the intensive communication with parents who are in the position of receiving educational services provides additional channels for the new knowledge acquisition process.

As quoted earlier, Garvin (1993:86) points out that in the absence of learning, organizations simply repeat old practices. That is to say, enhancing organizational development and gaining a competitive advantage is only possible through new knowledge acquisition, which is an essential part of learning. To do this, the use of various sources and methods of acquiring new knowledge is important in the sense that "more organizational learning occurs when more of the different sources are used" (Huber, 1991:91). Findings obtained from the three schools seem to support these statements: As we reported earlier, the Foundation School utilizes more ways and components of acquiring new knowledge. This may be one of the reasons why and how it ranked 30th in the 1994 University Entrance Examination in Turkey among 3700 schools, while the Private School and the Public School were ranking 356th and 628th, respectively.

Researches in the organizational area point out that different implementations of other organizations may initiate creative thoughts in schools. In other words, the best implementations of other organizations should be determined by systematic visits, conferences, discussions, and, the results obtained should be analyzed, evaluated and applied. The findings yield that none of the three schools covered in this study have any such efforts to acquire new knowledge from other schools.

Studies in organizational learning often state that knowledge gained from failures is often instrumental in achieving subsequent successes, and is also a crucial source for new knowledge acquisition that may breed creativity and innovation (Garvin, 1993:85). To enhance the learning capacity of organizations, "not only correcting responses but also detecting errors should be rewarded" (Schein, 1993:87). As we reported earlier, however, the teachers interviewed in the three schools stated that administrators do not have the skills to detect, or are not interested in detecting their own mistakes or other failing efforts in their schools. By this, a good source of innovation and learning apparently is not being tapped adequately in the schools.

It is often stated that when more organizational components are used in the knowledge acquisition process, more new knowledge is gained. What this means is that a degree of flexibility in organizational procedures, decentralization in structure and an open culture positively affect organizational learning. In the Foundation School, the interaction among administrator, teachers, parents, education specialists, and school governing board is loosely structured and they are granted a certain latitude to engage in various ways of acquiring new knowledge. In the Private School, however, even the school principal is under close supervision of the school founders, having been assigned the caretaker role, with only two school founders having full consent in almost all decisions and actions. Similarly, regarding the Public School, the school is under a tight control of the Ministry of Education. This finding concerning the overall performance of these schools in UEE ranking and the mode of administrative structure and processes (the factors enhancing or inhibiting the learning capacity) generally is consistent with the findings in the organizational learning literature that organizations should be structured loosely, should facilitate open culture and must create ways to support risk taking for their members.

Information Distribution and Sharing: In order to make the new knowledge to be used for organizational purposes at the highest level, this knowledge should be distributed within the school rapidly, and effectively, and shared broadly by teachers. By this, learning is expected to be an organizational process rather than an individual activity. Findings of this study indicate that the Foundation School has more intra- and extra-organizational activities concerning the distribution and sharing of new knowledge compared to the other two schools. On the other hand, the remaining two schools do not have a rich array of channels to distribute knowledge; they utilize very few methods for information distribution. Considering the fact we earlier stated that organizational structure and administrative processes in these two schools are rather centralized, distribution of such information to teachers and other school staff is considered an administrative obligation.

Information Interpretation: Daft and Weick (1984:292) define interpretation as the process through which information is given meaning. Similarly, Huber (1991:101) explains that "more learning occurs when more and more varied interpretations concerning new understanding, information and recommendation are developed." When the schools sampled in this study are evaluated in these aspects, it is concluded that information interpretation process in the Foundation School and in the Private School seem more effective compared to that of the Public School. Specifically, group studies, group work by the teachers who teach the same subject, and frequent meetings with administrators, teachers and parents provide essential contributions to this process. Of course, a relatively democratic atmosphere of the Foundation School seems a factor that positively influences the interpretation process. From our results, it is evident that there is no clear information interpretation process in the Public School. As the teachers of the school observed, things are flowing in their natural course and the school has no control over them. Thus revealing of creative views, and solutions are very difficult, and, therefore, only the known things repeat themselves. Competition with other schools or being more successful than other schools is not a concern in this school.

Organizational Memory: Organizations learn through their members. Organizational memory consists of learning gained by the organization's individuals, experiences, decisions, encountered problems, and solutions to remedy these problems. The information in organizational memory is stored for the purpose of providing contribution to solutions for problems to be encountered in the future. If this storage does not exist, learned experiences would evaporate shortly after these individuals leave the organization. To avoid this, individuals -administrators, teachers and other staff alike- should be provided various means (written or electronic) of recording their experiences, decisions and methods that they may have accumulated during their stay in the organization.

Our findings indicate that none of the three schools covered in this study have developed such mechanisms to store information for future use. Information stored in these schools is generally for proving or verifying the functions and proceedings applied usually for bureaucratic purposes. Such stored information may not provide an effective use for any affirmative contribution to new decision-making, considering the fact that organizational memory determines ideology, norms, values, and assumptions that frame the organization to some extent. Individuals may get in and out, but these aspects of organization should be preserved by means of organizational memory.

As our findings indicate, the Public School has the most serious learning deficiency compared to the other two schools. Public schools in Turkey are financed by the government. This stronghold of the government on public education has eventually turned public schools into public bureaucracies where administrators play a caretaker role. Almost all organizational functions (even operational ones) -financing, appointment, rotation, reward, punishment, performance evaluation, etc.- are granted to the central authority. Therefore, any attempt for school improvement is expected to come from the top authority. Thus, the teaching staff and administrators in public schools do not consider themselves as essential components of the school. Instead of a "my school" view, a " this is a school of the Ministry of Education" view prevails. Therefore, individuals are not able to construct an identity specific to that school and are not able to share a vision other than realizing the short-term goals of the school. As a result of our research, we can state that centralized, bureaucratic nature of the organizational structure seems not to breed organizational learning, and consequently change and improvement within the schools.

One of the most important findings of this study is that the ineffective operation of organizational learning processes in the Private School largely stems from its organizational structure and administrative processes. As we mentioned earlier, its organizational structure and decision-making styles somewhat resemble the centralized structure and practices of the Ministry of Education. At the top, there are the school

owners who are authorized to make all decisions, and at the lower levels there are administrators and teachers who are obliged to conform to such decisions unconditionally. This organizational structure in the school may constitute one of the major obstacles to effective learning in this school. Since innovation and improvement are expected from the top management, individuals do not feel the need for learning in a free-flowing, entrepreneurial manner.

Can private schools continue their existence without being learning organizations? Certainly not. Although the number and capacity of private schools in Turkey have substantially increased within the last decade, it is quite difficult to state that the demands for such schools has shown the same rate. Especially the economic decrees issued on April 5, 1994, have caused many students to switch from private schools to public schools because of substantial increases in tuition rates of private schools. Despite the decrease in enrollment and demand, private schools continue teaching with 40 to 50 percent capacity, this has intensified the competition in the private education sector. Without gaining competitive advantages through innovations and improvements that is, transforming themselves into learning organizations, it is difficult to sustain existence in this intensely competitive environment.

The view of complete privatization of education services has been gaining more supporters. However, as long as private schools are not able to transcend the conventions and traditions of the public schools, they will be lacking in providing new approaches and innovations. Therefore, it will take a considerably long period of time for private schools to reach a sustained level of excellent performance within the education system.

Most of the teachers and administrators in the Private School which was included in this study used to work in public schools. Their experiences, attitudes and expectations developed in public schools continue in the private school. Therefore, learning in these schools is limited and ineffective. There are clear implications of this fact in regards to human resource management and development in these schools.

Another obstacle to organizational learning in private schools is the view of "making more profit." Since schools are continuing their teaching activities with approximately half the capacity, they are not able to reach the expected profit level. Therefore, they tend to make savings by cutting costs of education. For example, they do not give priority to subscription to periodicals; thus, difficulties are encountered in new knowledge acquisition. Beside this, since teachers are not well paid, personnel turn-over is high, therefore, the experienced teachers leave the school with all their accumulated experiences and personal knowledge. Activities for professional development (conferences, seminars, etc.) are not organized, which seriously weaken new knowledge acquisition activities. While such restrictions turn into profit in the short term, they anticipate conditions for destruction in the long run.

The Foundation School, on the other hand, does not aim at making a profit. Tuition and fees charged to the students for education services are transferred into the education process. This condition provides an essential contribution to new knowledge acquisition process. For example, journals and publications requested by teachers are purchased, seminars are organized, and individuals from other institutions and abroad are invited to the school for in-service training activities.

The interviewed teachers from the Foundation School emphasized the success of the school rather than the success of the course that they teach. Although the goals articulated by the school administration cover such areas as "protection of the respectful identity of the school", "educating individuals to promote their unique identity and personality," and "being the best school," teachers also pointed out that they have a vision of "achieving excellence in education." This is why the processes of new knowledge acquisition, distribution and interpretation of information are carried out in the most effective way compared to the other two schools.

Thus, the Foundation School has effective learning processes. One of the important reasons for this is the fact that effective learning can be considered as the condition that each individual dedicates himself or herself to the success of the whole

school. Teachers do not see themselves as responsible only in the classroom, but also in the schoolyard, in the hall, on the street outside of the school. He or she acquires any new knowledge, situation and approach that he or she thinks may be relevant or useful for the school. It also seems that the Foundation School has been successful in creating a sense of "belongingness" within the school.

REFERENCES

Argyris, C. 1994. Good Communication That Blocks Learning. *Harvard Business Review*, 4, 77-85.

Argyris, C., and Schon, D. 1978. *Organizational Learning*, London: Addison-Wesley.

Bailey, K.D. 1982. *Methods of Social Research*. 2nd ed.: Newyork

Clair, G.S. 1993. Benchmarking, Total Quality Management, and The Learning Organization: New Management Paradigms for the Information Environment. *Special Libraries*, 84,3,120-122.

Cohen, B.J., and Austin, M.J. 1994. Organizational Learning and Change in a Public Child Welfare Agency. *Administration in Social Work*, 18, 1, 1-19.

Cyert, R., and March, J. 1963. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Daft, R. L., and Huber, G. 1986. How Organizations Learn: A Communication Framework. *Research in Sociology of Organization*, Vol. 5, JAI Press.

Daft, R.L., and Weick, K.E. 1984. Toward a Model of Organizations as Interpretation Systems, Academy of Management Review, 9, 284-295

Dodgson, M. 1993. Organizational Learning: A Review of Some Literatures. *Organization Studies*, 14, 3, 375-394.

Easterby-Smith, M. 1990. Creating a Learning Organisation. *Personnel Review*, 19, 5, 24-28.

Fiol, M., and . Lyles, M.A 1985. Organizational Learning. *Academy of Management Review*, 10, 4, 803-813.

Garvin, D.A. 1993. Building A Learning Organization. *Harvard Business Review*, 71, 4, 78-91.

Hedberg B. 1981. How Organizations Learn And Unlearn. *Handbook of Organizational Design*, 1, 3-27.

Huber, G.P. 1991. Organizational Learning: The Contributing Processes and The Literatures, *Organization Science*, 2, 1, 89-115.

Kim, D.H.1993. The Link Between Individual and Organizational Learning, *Sloan Management Review*, 35, 1, 37-50.

Kolb, D. A. 1984. *Exparientia1 Learning Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey Prentice-Hall.

Lee, S., Courtney, J.F., and O'Keefe,R.M.1992. A System for Organizational Learning Using Cognitive Maps, *Omega-International Journal of Management Sciences*, 20, 1, 23-36.

March, J.G., and Olsen, J.P. 1975. The Uncertainty of the Past: Organizational Learning under Ambiguity, *European Journal of Political Research*, 3, 147-171

March, J.G., and Olsen, J.P. 1976. *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations*. Bergen, Norway.

McShane, J. 1991. *Cognitive Development: An Information Processing Approach*, Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc.

Morgan, G. 1991. *Images of Organization*, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Ö.S.Y.M. 1993. *Ortaögretim Kurumlarina Göre 1993 Ögrenci Seçme ve Yerlestirme Sinavi Sonuçlari*. Ankara: ÖSYM Yayinlari-2.

Ö.S.Y.M. 1995. *Ortaögretim Kurumlarina Göre 1994 Ögrenci Seçme ve Yerlestirme Sinavi Sonuçlari*. Ankara: ÖSYM Yayinlari-4.

Patton, M.Q. (1980). Qualitative Evaluation Methods, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pedler, M.T., Boydel, T., and Burgayne, J. 1989. Towards The Learning Company. *Management Education and Development*, 20, 1, 1-8.

Salvin, R.E. 1986. *Educational Psychology: Theory into Practice*, New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs.

Schein, E.H. 1993a. On Dialogue, Culture, and Organizational Learning. *Organizational Dynamics*, Special Issue, Autumn, 40-51.

_____ 1993b. How Can Organizations Learn Faster? The Challenge of Entering The Green Room. *Sloan Management Review*, Winter.

Senge, P.M. 1990a. The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations. *Sloan Management Review*, Fall, 7-23.

_____ 1990b. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

_____ 1991. The Learning Organization Made Plain. *Training & Development*, 45, 10, 37-44.

Simon, A.H. 1991. Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning. *Organization Science*, 2, 1, 125-133.

Sinkula, M. 1994. Market Information Processing and Organizational. *Journal of Marketing*, 58, 1, 35-45.

Slocum, J.W., Mcgill, M., and Lei, D.T. 1994. The New Learning Strategy: Anytime, Anything, Anywhere. *Organizational Dynamics*, 23, 2, 33-47.

Stata, R. 1989. Organizational Learning: The Key to Management Innovation. *Sloan Management Review*, 30, 3, 63-74.

Sullivan, J.J., and Nonoka, I. 1986. The Application of Organizational Learning Theory to Japanese and American Management. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 17, 3, 127-147.

Simsek, H. 1992. *Organizational Change As A Paradigm Shift*, A Ph.D.Thesis, Minnesota.

Ulrich, D., Jick, T., and Glinow, M.A.V. 1993.High-Impact Learning: Building and Diffusing Learning Capability, *Organizational Dynamics*, Special Issue, Autumn, 52-66.

Walsh, J.P. and Ungson G.R. 1991.Organizational Memory. *Academy of Management Review*, 16, 1, 57-91.